

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATE HEALTH OFFICIALS STRESS AWARENESS OF HAZARDS DURING AND AFTER THE STORM

(Richmond, Va.)— The Virginia Department of Health (VDH) urges the public to make final preparations for shelter and supplies today and early tomorrow, ahead of Hurricane Florence's expected landfall Friday, September 14. It is also important to prepare for what the storm leaves behind and to be aware of the health and safety risks that windswept debris, floodwaters, and power outages may pose to your family and the community.

The effects of Hurricane Florence are expected to begin arriving in Virginia Thursday Sept 13, with wind and rainfall continuing through the weekend based on current forecasts of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). Visit the NOAA website for hurricane updates at <https://www.nhc.noaa.gov/>.

Flooding and fast-moving waters, especially in low-lying areas, are expected from this storm. Coastal areas will experience storm surge causing some areas to be underwater. Even what appear to be minor amounts of water on a roadway could be moving fast enough to pick up a vehicle attempting to cross. Submerged roads may actually be bridges or culverts that may collapse or wash away due to the weight and velocity of the floodwater.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report that over half of all flood-related drowning occur when a vehicle drives into hazardous floodwater. Stay safe on the roads - turn around, don't drown!

Flooding and heavy rains also increase the risk of human exposure to pollutants, which may cause illness. Contaminants are transported in rainwater as it travels over the land; ending up in rivers, lakes and streams. This mix of rain and pollution can pose risks to human health and safety.

The most common illnesses from contaminated water are gastrointestinal illnesses, which may cause vomiting, diarrhea, nausea, abdominal pain or fever. These illnesses result from swallowing water contaminated by disease-causing microbiological organisms. Additionally, contact with contaminated water has the potential to cause upper respiratory (ear, nose, throat) and skin infections.

Use the following recommendations from VDH to keep you and your family safe following heavy rain and flooding events:

- Use extreme caution and avoid unnecessary risks if you encounter covered roads or fast-moving waters. The water may be deeper and moving faster than you think.
- Floodwaters may contain debris that can break the skin or entrap legs and arms. Do not allow children and pets to play in floodwaters.
- Avoid swimming or wading in ditches, streams, and rivers for at least three days following a typical rain event. During flood events, avoid swimming and wading until waters return to normal levels.
- Do not wade through floodwaters with broken skin. Viruses and other organisms can infect wounds causing a more serious illness.
- If you cannot avoid wading through floodwaters, be sure to wash exposed skin and clothing with soap and water. Floodwaters are likely to contain high levels of bacteria and other pollutants.
- If you have an underlying illness like diabetes, liver disease, or cancer, you are more vulnerable to infections and should avoid contact with floodwaters.

Information on the safety of public water sources, including “Boil Water” frequently asked questions and the Boil Water procedures, is available at:

<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/drinking-water/>

Residents or facilities that provide water to the public including campgrounds, restaurants, summer camps, or daycares with private wells or septic systems submerged by floodwaters should also take extra precautions. Information and safety tips regarding private wells and septic systems is available at:

<http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-health/onsite-sewage-water-services-updated/before-and-after-the-storm-private-wells-and-onsite-sewage-systems/>

Power outages may also compromise the safety of refrigerated and frozen foods. The VDH recommendations for food safety following storm events include:

- Know how to determine if your food is safe at <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/news/public-relations-contacts/severe-weather-preparedness/food-safety/> .
- Information for restaurant operators is available at: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/environmental-health/food-safety-in-virginia/food-operators/restaurant-preparedness/>.

Here are several steps you can take to keep yourself and your loved ones safe throughout this hurricane season:

- Have an emergency kit prepared with supplies for your home and vehicle. A supply list for your kit may be found here: <http://www.vdh.virginia.gov/news/public-relations-contacts/severe-weather-preparedness/preparing-your-emergency-supply-kit/>
- Download the [Ready Virginia mobile app](#) to receive alerts and use a NOAA weather radio to stay informed.
- [Know Your Zone](#). Evacuation zones designated A through D are in place across coastal Virginia. In the event of a storm or other emergency, residents of one or more zones may be directed to evacuate depending on tides, storm intensity, path, and other factors.

For more information on hurricane preparedness, please visit the Virginia Department of Emergency Management at www.vaemergency.com and the American Red Cross at www.redcross.org.

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